

## Improving Disaster Communication: The Role of Poison Centers in Public Health

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health  
Video Communications and Distance Learning Division

## How Crucial Is Information?

Fear is mediated by information.  
Efficient person-to-person information mitigates worry and potentially keeps people from rushing to an emergency room for answers.

## National Toll Free Number



1 - 800 - 222 - 1222

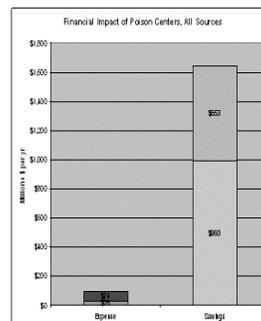
## Benefits of Poison Centers

- Reduce unnecessary ED visits for poison/ drug exposures
- Assist in improving care for poisoned victims
- Education
- Risk communication
- Assist in public health preparedness and disaster response
- Cost savings

## Cost Effectiveness

Every \$1 spent on poison centers saves the health care system \$7 (1997).

## Poison Center Financial Value



### Comparison of Financial Expenses and Savings Attributable to Poison Centers, US, 2005

Expenses:  
\$26M – direct Federal contribution,  
\$74M – other sources (TOM)

Savings:  
\$993M – reduced length of stay for poisonings attributable to Poison Center assistance  
\$653M – cost avoidance from reduction of ED visits by prehospital management of poison exposures by Poison Centers

## Poison Centers Reduce Pediatric ED Visits

Of parents who did not call the poison center, 44% went to an emergency room whereas less than 1% of parents who called the poison center went to a hospital (P <0.001)

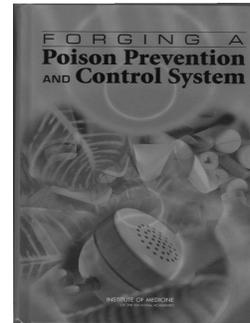
## Potential Future Roles

- Risk communication in a wide range of disasters:
  - Biological threats and emerging infections
  - Radiological
  - Chemical releases
  - Natural disasters

## Potential Roles

- Risk Communication
- Phone triage and referral of concerned patients
- Surveillance of other non-chemically related public health events
- Surveillance of adverse effects of medications that may be used in different types of illnesses
  - Some of these medications may have limited safety track record

## Institute of Medicine Report



## How Do We Build These Bridges?

- Contact appropriate personnel at state/local poison centers and begin to develop relationships
- Learn about how your poison center works
- Establish plans for how to work together in a disaster/mass event

## Useful Resources

- IOM report: The forging of poison control centers
- [www.aapcc.org](http://www.aapcc.org)
  - [www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov)
  - [www.clintox.org](http://www.clintox.org)
  - [www.acmt.net](http://www.acmt.net)
  - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)